

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1386

UNCLAS LONDON 06012

E. O. 11652: N/ A

TAGS: PINT, UK

SUBJECT: THE NEXT TWO BY- ELECTIONS

1. THE NEXT TWO PARLIAMENTARY BY- ELECTIONS ARE DUE TO TAKE PLACE AT WESTHOUGHTON AND WEST BROMWICH ON MAY 24. THEY ARE BOTH " SAFE" LABOR SEATS AND LABOR IS EXPECTED TO RETAIN THEM. MAJOR INTEREST WILL FOCUS ON THE SIZE OF ITS MAJORITIES. THE LIBERALS ARE NOT CONTESTING EITHER SEAT.

2. AT WESTHOUGHTON IN LANCASHIRE, LABOR IS FIELDING A YOUNG TRADE UNIONIST FROM NEARBY ROCHDALE, ROGER STOTT, TO FILL THE PLACE OF TOM PRICE, WHO HAD HELD THE SEAT FOR 22 YEARS UNTIL HIS DEATH LAST FEBRUARY. THE CONSERVATIVE CANDIDATE IS CYRIL UNSWORTH, ONE OF THE BEST- KNOWN FAMILY DOCTORS IN THE AREA. AT THE GENERAL ELECTION OF 1970, UNSWORTH REDUCED PRICE' S MAJORITY BY 8,000 VOTES BUT STILL FELL 6,000 VOTES SHORT. A THIRD CANDIDATE OF NO SIGNIFICANCE IS BRIAN O' HARA. THERE ARE NO BURNING LOCAL ISSUES, SO THE ELECTION WILL BE A STRAIGHT- FORWARD CONTEST BETWEEN THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES FOUGHT ON NATIONAL ISSUES, I. E., PRICES, WAGES, UN-EMPLOYMENT.

3. AT WEST BROMWICH, AN UGLY SUBURB OF BIRMINGHAM, REPRESENTED BY MAURICE FOLEY UNTIL HE TOOK A JOB WITH THE EC COMMISSION IN BRUSSELS, THE BY- ELECTION IS UNCLASSIFIED

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COMPLICATED BY THE RACIALIST CAMPAIGN OF A NATIONAL FRONT CANDIDATE, MARTIN WEBSTER. THERE ARE ABOUT 8,000 IMMIGRANTS IN WEST BROMWICH, BUT RACE HAS NEVER BEEN A PROBLEM HERE. THE LABOR CANDIDATE, BETTY BOOTHROYD, HAS BEEN CONCENTRATING ON RISING PRICES, WHILE THE CONSERVATIVE CANDIDATE, DAVID BELL, IS PLAYING UP BRITAIN'S ECONOMIC BOOM. POLLUTION IS ALSO AN ISSUE, BUT IN THE MAIN THE VOTERS ARE APATHETIC. A FOURTH CANDIDATE, JOSHUA CHURCHMAN, IS STANDING AS AN INDEPENDENT.

4. LABORITES HAD BEEN FRANKLY NERVOUS THAT A LIBERAL INTERVENTION IN WEST BROMWICH MIGHT COST THEM THE SEAT, BUT THE LIBERALS DECIDED NOT TO CONTEST THE ELECTION. THEY FOUND THEIR RESOURCES COMPLETELY ABSORBED IN FIGHTING THE RECENT COUNTRYWIDE LOCAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS -- A CLEAR MEASURE OF THE RESTRAINTS THEIR LIMITED BUDGET AND MANPOWER PLACE ON ANY POTENTIAL LIBERAL REVIVAL AT A GENERAL ELECTION.

ANNENBERG

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